Columns
Religious Life



Sr. Anne Lyons presents her book, "The Story of Nano Nagle, A Life Lived on the Razor's Edge," to Pope Francis in October 2022. Lyons completed a two-year course required to become her congregation's postulator for Nano Nagle's beatification cause. (Courtesy of Anne Lyons)



by Anne Lyons

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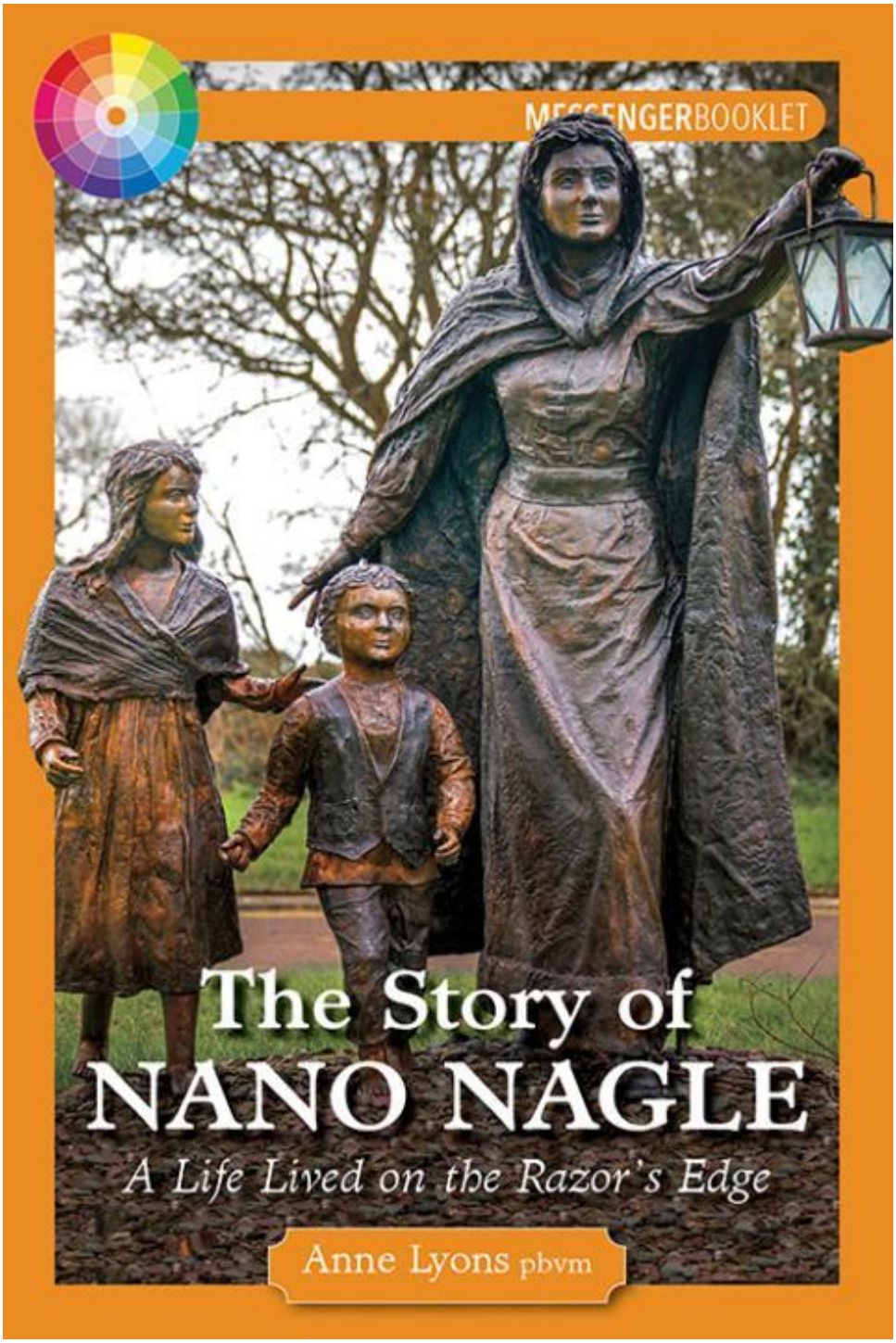
February 21, 2024

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I was scheduled for a sabbatical after many years of service in my congregation, the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded in 1775. I had worked in education and spirituality in Ireland, the U.S., Pakistan and Cambodia, with short terms in New Zealand, England and Zimbabwe.

And so, on Jan. 9, 2020, with bags packed and mixed feelings of excitement and hope, I said goodbye to my mother, family, friends and community and boarded the plane for San Antonio, Texas, for a five-month sabbatical. However, my excitement came to an abrupt end when, in early March, COVID-19 changed everything. Disappointed, I returned six weeks later to a lock-downed Ireland, the longed-for sabbatical disappearing like morning dew.

Before that return to Ireland, during the early "halcyon days" in San Antonio, my initial carefree mood was interrupted. Our central leadership invited me to a Zoom call, asking me to consider the role of postulator for the ongoing cause of Venerable Nano Nagle. My initial reaction was disbelief. Why me? However, following a period of discernment, gathering data and listening in prayer, I eventually said "yes." My one certainty was a passionate belief in the vision, mission and prophetic, pioneering stance of Nano Nagle, our congregation's foundress.



"The Story of Nano Nagle: A Life Lived on the Razor's Edge" profiles the woman who founded the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This new work as a postulator was to prove more unique and defined than any other work I had previously engaged in when promoting Nano's life. Passion and goodwill would not be sufficient, and my yes would be tested. I needed to trust in divine

providence to see me through.

The cause of Nano Nagle reached a significant milestone in 2013, when the worldwide Presentation family rejoiced in Pope Francis' declaration of Nano as a woman of "heroic virtue," conferring on her the title "Venerable." He put her before the world as a model, worthy of imitation for Christian life in the world today. He also affirmed that she had met the criteria leading to sainthood. The next step, beatification, would require one miracle through her intercession.

There are four stages in the cause for canonization: servant of God, venerable, blessed and saint. The role of the postulator is to promote the cause for beatification and canonization, a task I found daunting and somewhat overwhelming. I was faced with studying and becoming proficient in all things pertaining to this process, including central theological, historical and legal procedures, and Italian, offering a further challenge.

I arrived in Rome in September 2020, facing a new culture, language, traffic, accommodation, and people. It was lonely, and I soon learned that the role of a postulator is solitary by nature.

Six weeks after I arrived in Rome, COVID-19 gripped Italy, sending me back to Ireland once again. Psalm 139 came to mind, describing God as a seamstress weaving the tapestry of life. My home weaving was vibrant, rich, energetic and consoling, allowing me the privilege to be close to my mother, whose health was declining.

A further joy was having my booklet, *The Story of Nano Nagle: A Life Lived on the Razor's Edge*, published and used throughout the world. Seamstress God wove interviews, webinars and invitations offering opportunities to foster increased devotion and appreciation of this great woman.

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In September 2021, I returned to Rome, facing another surprise — a radical change in the course of study for postulators. The previous intensive Studium, instituted in 1984, was terminated and replaced with the School of Higher Formation in the Causes of Saints, initiated by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints and the Pontifical Lateran University. The new timeframe would be two years, including 19

courses, a thesis, oral and written exams each semester, and a *l'esame finale*.

Fears and doubt crept in uninvited. Could I gain the required Italian competency for lectures in theology, canon law and church history, alongside the theological-juridical foundations of canonized holiness and history and the law of the causes of saints? Would I have the stamina for two years of study and daily living?

My constant prayer: "*O Dio, viene al salvarmi, O Dio viene in mio aiuto*" ("God, come to my aid, Oh Lord, make haste to help me") was heard. God turned up in many guises. A theology student, observing my struggle to understand the lecturer, tapped me on the shoulder saying, "from today, I will be your guardian angel, for this course." *Che fortuna per me!* (How lucky for me!) Another gifted person shared with me, nearly perfectly verbatim, the lectures! This assistance during an intensive and concentrated second year was an invaluable gift.

While the first year of the course was foundational, the second year focused specifically on the regulations and role of a postulator. It aimed to equip a postulator with skills for any investigation process for the servant of God phase or for miracles that could lead to the beatification and canonization of the individual.



Sr. Anne Lyons, center, poses with Srs. Nisha and Elena at the Lateran University in Rome on July 7, 2023. That day they took their final exam for a two-year program

required for postulators. (Courtesy of Anne Lyons)

Finally, July 7, 2023, arrived. After two years of lectures, oral and written exams, a thesis and a final exam, I was officially recognized as the congregation's postulator. It had been an amazing journey of light and shade, twists and turns. The two years deepened my appreciation and understanding that the heart of the rigorous and complex process in the journey toward sainthood is a search for the truth, and [I understood] why it can often take so many years. I also discovered the importance of teamwork in the processes — postulator and Dicastery of the Causes of Saints working together in the search for truth.

I returned to Ireland with a sense of urgency about Nano Nagle's cause, hoping for the required miracle(s) through her intercession. Alleged miracles require the discerning eye of the postulator, faithful recording of all such favors and rigorous, in-depth investigation at both diocesan and Roman levels.

The search for the needed miracle also requires being a global team builder — finding creative ways to galvanize the tremendous groundswell of global energy witnessed in the 2013 "Venerable" designation and 2018 on the tercentenary of Nano's birth. It also means keeping enthusiasm alive in the congregation and Presentation family as we approach the significant milestone in 2025 — 250 years since the foundation of the congregation. Through it all, I have learned well that, "With God all things are possible."